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GLORIA MOLINA APPLAUDS PARTIAL T.R.O. PROTECTING WHITTIER HILLS FROM GRADING OR DRILLING

Open Space Purchased with Taxpayer Dollars Meant for Environmental Preservation Could Be Threatened by Oil Drilling Interests

LOS ANGELES (January 31, 2013)—Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina applauded a ruling today by Los Angeles Superior Court Judge James Chalfant prohibiting any grading or digging on the Whittier Hills site by the Matrix Oil Corp.—a victory for the County of Los Angeles and the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA), which jointly filed an Ex Parte Application for a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) early this morning to stop any digging on the site after bulldozers and earth-moving equipment were spotted on the property late yesterday afternoon.

“This partial T.R.O. is a major win for Los Angeles County taxpayers and for residents living near the Whittier hills,” Molina said. “It’s outrageous that public funds meant for park creation were used to purchase some of Los Angeles County’s last pristine open space not for environmental preservation but for oil drilling. That’s exactly the opposite of what voters had in mind when they passed Proposition A in 1992. The City of Whittier and the Matrix Oil Corp. know this – just like they knew full well that this entire matter was in dispute when they ordered bulldozers and earth-moving equipment to the Whittier hills site yesterday afternoon.”

In court today, attorneys for the City of Whittier and the Matrix Oil Corp. argued that today’s brush clearance was necessary because hummingbird nesting season begins soon and lasts through the August—meaning any brush clearance would have to wait until after that time.

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In response, Judge Chalfant granted a partial T.R.O. allowing hummingbird-related brush clearance to proceed on roughly two acres of the site and an additional two acres on both sides of the road leading up to it. But Judge Chalfant explicitly prohibited any grading or digging in the project area.

“Residents along Catalina Avenue—who are overwhelmingly against drilling and who live on the main road leading to the Whittier hills—did not see any bulldozers or earth-moving equipment heading up to the site,” Molina said. “The only other way in is through a road from the nearby Puente Hills Landfill—a road that no one can see. If we hadn’t learned about the bulldozers by chance yesterday, it’s quite likely that grading and digging in this protected habitat would have begun this morning. Attempting to do a secret dig is egregious enough. But interestingly, a preliminary injunction Los Angeles County and the MRCA filed in December was supposed to be heard in Court today—yet it wasn’t because the Matrix Oil Corp. disqualified Judge Richard Fruin, Jr., getting the motion off calendar.”

The partial T.R.O. stays in effect until February 21, 2013, when a preliminary injunction hearing will be held.

The Whittier hills comprise 1,209 acres of pristine, essentially untouched land perfect for environmental preservation. Indeed, the City of Whittier used \$17 million in Proposition A funds to purchase the site in 1994. But instead of preserving open space or creating parkland, the City of Whittier voted unanimously in November of 2011 to grant the Matrix Oil Corp. rights to drill for oil on a seven-acre site in the hopes of pumping 1,000 barrels of crude a day in order to generate between \$7.5 million to \$115.4 million annually, according to a city study.

The Matrix Oil Co. plans to construct an oil-truck loading facility, a gas plant, and an oil processing plant in the Whittier hills. They initially would be allowed to drill and test up to three wells – but eventually they could drill 49 more. During the project’s construction phase, trucks would enter and exit the property using Catalina Avenue.

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